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AUTHOR Fabien, Miriam R.
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ABSTRACT

Professional communicators are often called upon to announce changes at places of business and to implement them in a timely fashion. One approach that works (and minimizes confusion) is to plan carefully to achieve three key objectives: Understanding, Support, and Action (USA). To promote understanding, those who have decided on the change should be willing to share the information that needs to be communicated with those who are to communicate the change. To enlist support, people's concerns about how the change will affect them should be addressed. To motivate action, clear explanations of what is to be done and how the task is to be accomplished, along with reasons for the change, should be offered. To successfully communicate change, the implications for all concerned should be addressed. (NKA)

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USA: A SCHEMA FOR COMMUNICATING CHANGE

Miriam R. Fabien

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As professional communicators we are often called upon to announce changes occurring at our places of businesses and expected to do so in such a way that people will accept the changes and implement them in a timely fashion. Accomplishing this task can be a pleasurable experience when the change is one that is viewed favorably or does not affect many people. At other times, however, we can find ourselves in the midst of turmoil or being treated as the scapegoat for all that is unpleasant or undesirable about the change. Yet there are steps we can take to minimize confusion, complaints and rejection and to motivate acceptance and compliance.

One approach that works, whether announcing a change or helping to implement it, is to plan carefully to achieve three key objectives: understanding, support, and action (USA for a handy acronym). Long before we announce a change, we must consider how we will promote understanding, enlist support, and motivate action.

Promote Understanding

Because people resist what they do not understand, we must first be certain we ourselves understand what the change involves. For example, we need answers to the following questions, among others.

What problem does the change address?

Why must the change occur?

Exactly what will happen?

How much of the problem is the change expected to solve?

Further, we should be clear about the expected outcomes and we should question the possibility of unintended outcomes. Those who have decided on the change should be willing to share this information with us if

they expect us to communicate the change successfully. Once we understand what is to happen and know why, when, where and how the change will occur, we will be able to formulate plans for lessening people's natural resistance to change by providing good reasons for it to occur.

Enlist Support

To enlist support, we must be prepared to address people's concerns about how the change will affect them. Again, key questions should be asked.

Will the change affect people's status or their responsibilities?

Will people be expected to perform different tasks differently?

Will they be expected to perform different tasks?

Must they change the way they currently work?

Will they lose autonomy? Or gain some?

Will their performance be measured differently?

Will there be economic repercussions?

Must people acquire new skills or education?

In other words, to enlist support, we must be prepared to address the ever important WIFM (What's in it for me?).

Motivate Action

To motivate action, we must be certain our communications (in whatever form they take) convey the information we've developed to promote understanding and enlist support. Along with clear explanations of what is to be done and how the task is to be accomplished, we must communicate an overall understanding of the reasons for the change and how problems associated with it are to be addressed. Again, those who want the change to occur should be willing to cooperate in permitting us to share the information with our audience. If not, we must help them realize

that well-informed people are generally more likely to accept change and act on it than those who have not been provided with sufficient information.

Thus, to successfully communicate change, we must first understand the change and its implications for those with whom we interact. If we are well informed, we will be able to communicate the change in ways which will minimize objections, motivate acceptance, and promote a smooth and orderly transition. **Think USA: understanding, support, action.**

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Miriam Fabien is Associate Professor of English and Director of the Professional and Technical Writing Program, Madonna University, Livonia, MI 48150.